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SUBJECT: TURKISH MEDIA REACTION
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2010

Media Highlights

US Embassy Ankara - Turkey Media Reaction - February 19, 2010 as prepared by the Public Affairs Information Office

How the US is Playing

U/S Burns in Turkey; Clinton-Davutoglu Telephone Diplomacy on Iran and Armenia
U/S Burns rocket visit to Turkey was part of extensive coverage of Turkish FM Davutoglu's telephone diplomacy with Secretary Clinton on Iran and Armenia that media claim took place on 2/17. Tabloid Aksam in "Telephone Traffic on Iran," draws a link between FM Davutoglu's numerous calls and shuttle diplomacy on Iran during the same week that US had senior officials in the region. Mainstream Hurriyet reports "FM Davutoglu met U/S Burns in Ankara to discuss the results of his talks with top Iranian officials. FM Davutoglu told U/S Burns that Iran was willing to maintain negotiation. He asked the US to insist on finding a solution through diplomatic channels." Headlines in Cumhuriyet and Aksam say "Davutoglu's Iran Traffic" and "Telephone Diplomacy for Iran" and note that Davutoglu told the press on 2/18 that "there is strong ground for diplomacy on Iran, and we believe we can proceed on those grounds." In "After Getting the Word from Iran, Davutoglu Speaks to Clinton," liberal Radikal says "FM Davutoglu spoke with Secretary Clinton on the phone to give details about his contacts in Iran, and has plans to hold talks with the National Security Council head Jim Jones. After his talks with Burns, FM Davutoglu also held a telephone conversation with Iranian FM Mottaki. Davutoglu also said Prime Minister Erdogan would call President Obama to give first-hand information about Turkish proposals to defuse tensions with Iran. "Erdogan will explain to President Obama Turkey's nuclear formula on Iran," says Islamist-oriented Zaman. "The steps on Iran had been planned together with the US. We will make an evaluation after speaking with Washington," Zaman quotes Davutoglu as saying. Forecasting a call from PM Erdogan to President Obama, Islamist-oriented Today's Zaman intones "The Ball is in Turkey's Court," and opines that Ankara is "hopeful and unwavering" in its efforts to salvage the "UN-brokered uranium swap deal as calls grow for sanctions."

On Armenia: Sabah headlines "Yerevan Traffic Between Turkey and US,"

while mainstream Hurriyet says "Message to US: Armenian Genocide Resolution will Damage Ties," and reports that FM Davutoglu called the Secretary and said "stop the AGR immediately." Most media noted U/S Burns visit was not open to the media and his schedule included meetings with Turkish U/S Sinirlioglu and Deputy Chief of Defense Guner under the US-Turkey "Shared Vision and Structured Dialogue" mechanism.

Commentary:

In "The Fine Line of Being Objective," mainstream Milliyet's senior columnist Sami Kohen comments that Turkey doesn't play the role of mediator in the Iran issue. He explains that in order to play such a role, the mission should be given from the both parties officially. He says "Turkey is just trying to eliminate the tensions between Iran and the International community by keeping the communication channels open. Ankara is following a constructive objectiveness policy. Iran is pleased with all these developments but the Western world has some concerns. While fulfilling such missions, it is very hard to keep sensitive balances. Therefore, it is necessary to be careful what is said. Prime Minister Erdogan's comments to support Iran from time to time have caused concern about Turkey's objective stance. If the communication between Iran and the international community is cut off, and the implementation of sanctions against Iran voted at the UN Security Council, it will be very difficult for Turkey to pursue the same stance. If Turkey abstains from the vote, it will be interpreted as another sign that Turkey is slipping away from West while getting closer to Iran."

Wexler: Turkey Shifting toward Iran Claims Absurd (Zaman)
Islamist-oriented dailies Zaman, Yeni Safak and Hurriyet online

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report former US Congressman Robert Wexler told a Washington panel held by the Turkish think-tank SETA Foundation it would be "absurd" to claim Turkey was breaking from the West and shifting toward the Iranian axis. "In the long term, Turkey's Iran engagement will help the interests of moderate forces in the region," emphasized Wexler. He also noted Turkey could be an intermediary between Israel and Syria. "Turkish Leaders Deserve Praise" headlines Yeni Safak and quotes Wexler as saying, "Both the Turkish and Armenian leadership deserve great credit for taking enormous political and domestic risks for normalization of ties." Wexler said he would like to advise Turkish leaders to "stay one step ahead" in this process, stressing that such an attitude would serve Turkey's interests. Wexler noted he still expects the State Department and the Pentagon to oppose the AGR which will be put to vote in early March in the House Foreign Relations Committee, as they did under past administrations.

Washington Praises the US-Turkey-Iraq Mechanism (Sabah)
Mainstream Sabah reports the US Ambassador to Iraq, Chris Hill, praised Turkey's "positive and active role" in Iraq in his address to the US Peace Institute. Hill said the three-party mechanism between the US, Turkey and Iraq not only reduced the PKK threat on Turkey, but also developed security and cooperation between Turkey and Iraq on the matter. Hill said Turkish companies including oil firms had been active not only in the Kurdish region but around the entire country. On Cyprus, Hill expressed support to the process aiming to find a solution in the divided island. Hill also noted the US would pull all combat troops out of Iraq by the end of August, reports Sabah.

In the Headlines

Armenian Parliament to Discuss Protocols with Turkey Today (Zaman)
Islamist-oriented Zaman reports the Armenian Parliament's foreign relations committee would discuss today the normalization protocols with Turkey, and expects a "general assembly discussion" in March. In Turkey, the protocols are waiting at the parliament's foreign relations committee, and it is not clear when or whether they will be submitted to general parliamentary discussion, says Zaman.

Commentary on Turkey-Armenia Protocols

Writing in pro-government Islamist-oriented Today's Zaman, Etyen Mahcupyan in "Turkey Unable to Assimilate the Protocols" observes that the protocols were thought to be the precursor to a new period.

But, "Turkey was not expecting Armenia to accept the idea of a commission of historians so quickly" and has raised other concerns (NK and the Armenian Court ruling) as a delaying tactic. "It seems that Turkey has postponed the protocols," he writes "and is not ready to carry the weight of its own initiative. " He notes that the disinformation in Turkey about the Armenia court's decision "is not very beneficial" and that "a distressed Turkey is now talking about the intentional exertion of pressure and the existence of a secret ill intention. But, the truth is in the open -- the government does not have the strength or the will to bear the weight of the Armenian initiative. Maybe they never wanted to from the beginning and just had too much confidence that the other side would not take a positive step. "

Commentary on Judiciary-Government Dispute

In "Vicious Cycle," liberal Radikal's senior columnist Murat Yetkin agrees with President Gul's 2/18 public comment on the need for judicial reform and says "President Gul referring to the polarization between judiciary and the government as the "vicious cycle" is a more critical situation than expected. These comments show that President Gul finds neither party one hundred percent right. At first glance, Gul suggesting judicial reform might be interpreted as him approving the government's line on the issue but it is important for him to mention the EU standards and also the necessity of the opposition and judicial agreement for the judicial reform. Turkey definitely needs constitutional change but, it is not very realistic to expect reforms with the current balances in

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parliament. It is much more honest not to waste Turkey's time with such unrealistic targets."

Yavuz Baydar in Islamist-oriented Today's Zaman in "New Closure Case is Looming" opines that "It was evident that the high judiciary and the government were doomed to move into a crash course and mid-Feb 2010 will go down in history as a turning point in this inevitable and decisive journey." He continues that "in the wake of the decision by HSYK, the frontlines have become clear." Baydar believes that the government and PM Erdogan know that the judiciary -- "a consistent stumbling block " -- is not only displaying an act of self defense but has now exposed itself as the staunch defender of the system of tutelage based on an alliance between itself and the military. He concludes that government realizes that unless this block is confronted through democratic means, it will firmly prepare the ground for the collapse of the AK Party rule."

Mustafa Unal in Islamist oriented Zaman stresses that the only way to end the February 17 process is a judicial reform which will change the structure of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), according to universal standards, instead of Ankara's criteria.

Yilmaz Ozdil commented in mainstream Hurriyet: "The ones who describe countering religious fundamentalism as crime, or who order the pro-Republic military commanders to the courts and who carry the courts to the terrorists' feet, have no judicial lessons to give to this country."

TV Spotlight (CNN Turk)

President Gul said Turkey needs judicial reforms to avoid new polarizations and urged political parties to cooperate.

Court of Appeals President Hasan Gerceker agreed with President Gul that Turkey needs judicial reforms, but stressed there was a huge gap between the reforms wanted by the judiciary and the government.

Umit Boyner, the new president of the Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (TUSIAD), warned about the harmful effects of the politicization of the judiciary. Tension in judiciary was also reflected in the markets, the stock exchange index dropped 1.55 percent.

Turkish Parliament has passed a bill for the establishment of a special anti-terror undersecretariat. The opposition says the bill

was part of the AK Party efforts to create its own "deep state."

The National Security Council (MGK) will convene Friday under the chairmanship of President Gul.

On Friday, the suspects charged with the murder of three Christian missionaries in Malatya will appear before the court for the 24 time.

The privatization of the state-owned tobacco company Tekel forces tobacco producers in southeast Turkey to leave their villages.

The EU's "EU and Expansion Policies" draft report urges Turkey to pull troops out of Cyprus by the end of this year and give the ghost city of Varosha (Maras) to Greek Cypriots.

Turkish Airlines (THY) will sign a main sponsorship deal with Greek basketball club Maroussi.

Iranian President Ahmadinejad told Hezbollah leader Nasrallah that Israel "should be dealt with once and for all" if it makes further threats to the countries in the region.

President Obama met the Dalai Lama in the White House in expression

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of solidarity with Tibet's quest for human rights.

A small airplane crashes into a building near the FBI office in Austin, Texas.

Hamas rulers said they have released 22 prisoners belonging to the rival Fatah movement as a goodwill gesture.
JEFFREY